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1484

A

SERMON

Preached at the

VISITATION

OF THE

Rev. Dr. Moss, Archdeacon of *Colchester*,

(Now Lord Biſhop of St. DAVID's)

And before the

UNIVERSITY OF *OXFORD.*

[Price One Shilling.]

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Preached at the

VISITATION

BRITISH MUSEUM

Rev. Dr. Moss, Archdeacon of Cleveland,

(Now Lord Bishop of St. DAVID'S)

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The Evidence from Miracles ſtated, and vindicated from ſome late Objections:

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Rev. Dr. Moss, Archdeacon of *Colcheſter*,

(Now Lord Biſhop of St. DAVID'S)

At St. *Peter's* COLCHESTER, *May* 20, 1765.

And before the

UNIVERSITY OF *OXFORD*,

May 24, 1767.

By NATHANIEL FORSTER, M. A.
Rector of All-Saints, Colcheſter, and Tolleſhunt-Knight's, Eſſex, and late Fellow of Baliol-College OXFORD.

LONDON:

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By NATHANIEL FORSTER, M.A.
Rector of All-Saints, Colchester, and Tutelary-Knight's, Essex, and late Fellow of Balliol-College Oxford.

LONDON:

PREFACE.

THE following diſcourſe has two objects in view. Firſt, To fix the authority of revelation upon the firm and impregnable baſis of morality and natural religion. And ſecondly, To vindicate the evidence from miracles, the only deciſive evidence of a divine revelation, from ſome objections which ſtrike at its very root.

Under the former head the author does not pretend to have advanced any thing new. He hopes only, that what he has ſaid upon this point may be thought ſatisfactory and concluſive. He has not however been ſolicitous to tread exactly in the ſteps of others; but has taken ſuch ground, as he thought he was able to maintain. The general ſpirit of anſwers is, to make at once a furious attack upon their opponents, without waiting to conſider, where their own real ſtrength lies, or in what quarter they may make the moſt effectual impreſſion.

Inſtead

Inſtead of ſecuring their ground at home, and acting upon the defenſive, they are eager to carry their arms into the enemy's territories, where, for want of a previous acquaintance with the country, they are frequently thrown into difficulties, out of which they are not eaſily able to extricate themſelves; and in conſequence afford their antagoniſts ſome grounds of at leaſt a partial triumph. It has therefore been remarked, and with ſome juſtice, of many of the writers on the ſide of revelation, that in repelling the attacks of their adverſaries they have diſcovered often a greater ſhare of zeal than of policy. An exceſs of ſolicitude has betrayed them into indiſcretions. And thus the cauſe of religion, like that of morality, according to the obſervation of Lord *Shafteſbury*, has ſuffered from being over-propped, and from too tender an apprehenſion for its ſafety. This conduct indeed, however imprudent, is perfectly natural. When our deareſt poſſeſſions are in danger, we are apt on the preſent alarm to ſeize at all hazards the firſt rather than the beſt methods of defence. No juſt and conſiſtent plan is attended to; and amidſt our

indignation

indignation and horror at the temerity of our antagoniſts, we are inclined to believe every artifice we can employ againſt them legitimate, and every argument of weight: without reflecting, that nothing can hurt any cauſe ſo eſſentially as a violent and injudicious defence of it, and that the beſt reaſonings ſuffer in their credit at leaſt from the neighbourhood and contagion of bad ones. Theſe conſiderations, which perhaps ought to have determined the author againſt embarking at all in an attempt of ſo much delicacy, have at leaſt determined him to proceed with the utmoſt caution in the ſteps which he has taken.

The principal objection to the evidence from miracles conſidered in the latter part of this diſcourſe, and which indeed gave occaſion to it, came originally from one of the profoundeſt reaſoners that this or any a age produced. It contains therefore, as might well be expected, conſiderable difficulty. Many anſwers have been given to it. It is far from the author's thoughts to detract from the merit of any of them. He has only to ſay, that he has conſidered the difficulty with all the attention he was capable

of, and has at leaſt contributed ſomething, as he thinks, towards the ſolution of it. The two other general objections were ſtarted or at leaſt revived, by a writer whoſe reaſoning and judgment are not always equal to his great powers of imagination and eloquence. And they admit of a much eaſier anſwer. As however they bear equally hard upon the general evidence from miracles, and as the author had not obſerved, that they had been particularly taken notice of ſince their appearance in the publications of the above-mentioned writer, he thought it not improper to give them a ſhort examination.

Juſt publiſhed by the ſame Author,

AN ENQUIRY into the CAUSES of the preſent HIGH PRICE of PROVISIONS: Containing ESSAYS on RICHES, LUXURY, TAXES, CORN, EXPORTATION, and IMPORTATION, INGROSSING, INCLOSURES, BREAD, CATTLE and HORSES.——*Non la meſure des choſes, mais la meſure de ma vûe.* MONTAIGNE.

Sold by J. FLETCHER and Co. in *St. Paul's Church-yard.*

The Evidence from Miracles ſtated, and vindicated from ſome late Objections.

JOHN X. 25.

The works that I do in my Father's name, they bear witneſs of me.

OBJECTIONS to the religion we profeſs are to be conſidered, either as levelled againſt the internal ſcheme and principles of the religion itſelf, together with the ſeveral articles and doctrines contained in it, or as directed againſt the evidence produced in atteſtation of its truth. In regard to objections of the former ſort, it is to be obſerved in general, that we are not to expect, that every difficulty ſhould be cleared up, or that we ſhould be made fully acquainted with the whole deſign of Providence in his diſpenſations to his creatures. This is not in any reſpect the preſent ſtate of man. The whole world, both

natural and moral, abounds with myſteries; and all its operations are derived from ſprings and cauſes, of the nature of which we have ſcarce the moſt diſtant glimpſe. To expect therefore a clear and complete view of any peculiar adminiſtration, which God Almighty ſhall have thought proper to carry on and diſpenſe to his creatures, is to expect more than our capacities and our ſituation in other reſpects will warrant or admit. And to enquire into the truth of any ſyſtem of religion with this expectation, is to enquire, not as men, but as an higher order of beings. With regard to objections of the latter ſort, viz. objections againſt the evidence for our religion, the caſe is widely different. Theſe have a fair claim to our attention and examination. For tho' in many inſtances the point to be proved may from its very nature be above our comprehenſion and faculties, the proof itſelf muſt however be always level to our capacities, and perfectly intelligible to us. Reaſon in all matters of evidence is the ſole arbiter and judge. The evidence therefore muſt be of ſuch a nature, as to be the proper object of reaſon; muſt be calculated to influence

fluence and determine the aſſent, according to the principles of our frame, and the circumſtances in which we are placed. It will not then I hope be thought entirely foreign to the deſign for which we are now met, to recollect a little and conſider the nature and principles of that evidence, upon which every revelation from heaven muſt ſtand, and upon which the chriſtian in particular was by its divine Author originally placed. And an attempt of this kind will be the more uſeful, if we ſhall hereby be able to ſatisfy ourſelves with reſpect to ſome difficulties that have been thrown in our way by the advocates of incredulity; or can, on the other hand, give a check to ſome falſe and equally injurious methods of defence, which have been made uſe of by thoſe who have unwarily run into an oppoſite extreme.

By a divine revelation is meant a ſyſtem of truths communicated to mankind by immediate inſpiration from God, in contradiſtinction to ſuch as are diſcovered and apprehended by the exerciſe of thoſe powers of reaſon, which we enjoy as men in a ſtate of nature merely. A revealed truth therefore eſſentially differs from every other truth,

in that it is received and admitted upon authority only; upon the authority of that Being who can neither deceive nor be deceived. It differs from them in the manner of its being conveyed and diſcovered to the mind; deſcending immediately from the author of all things, and deriving all its influence upon mankind from the authority of its divine origin. Reaſon in this caſe is evidently concerned to be ſatisfied of the truth of the two following propoſitions.

1ſt, That whatever doctrine or propoſition appears to be thus derived from God is true. And,

2dly, That the particular doctrine or propoſition offered to us with this pretenſion, has a real and juſt title to the divine origin which it claims.

The former of theſe is a fundamental principle of natural religion; ariſing from thoſe notions and apprehenſions of God, which we have previouſly acquired by the exerciſe of our reaſon; and muſt therefore be ſuppoſed true, before any thing can be offered as a matter of divine revelation. To go about to prove, that a ſyſtem of truths is derived immediately from God, without a pre-

a previous conviction of the exiſtence of a Deity, appears at the firſt view to be prepoſterous and abſurd. Nor is this conviction alone ſufficient. For ſurely we muſt know enough likewiſe of the divine nature and attributes, to be convinced that God cannot be deceived himſelf, and will not deceive us; that is, we muſt be convinced, that he is a Being of infinite power, knowledge, juſtice, and goodneſs, before we are capable of admitting any particular doctrine or propoſition even upon divine authority. Indeed every kind of proof, that can be alledged in confirmation of a divine revelation, muſt ariſe and derive all its evidence and ſtrength from the great truths of natural religion. It muſt ariſe from them, and be drawn out of them, as in a ſyllogiſm the concluſion follows from the premiſſes, or as in geometry, the whole ſubſequent chain of reaſoning depends upon the truth of the axioms and firſt principles of this ſcience, and indeed is virtually contained in them. Thus, for inſtance, miracles are an avowed appeal to the Deity, as an all-wiſe, good, and powerful Being, the creator and governor of the world; and therefore can be no evidence, where the belief of theſe truths is

not

not previouſly eſtabliſhed. They are no evidence to him, who believes that the ſyſtem of the univerſe owed its beginning to chance, or an undeſigning cauſe, or that the courſe of nature ſtill goes on in the ſame blind undirected channel. No revelation therefore, however eſtabliſhed by indutitable miracles, can poſſibly from the nature of the thing be in itſelf a proof of the exiſtence and character of that Being by whoſe power and interpoſition ſuch miracles are ſuppoſed to have been wrought, but muſt neceſſarily appeal to theſe truths as the foundation of its own evidence.

And with reſpect to the internal marks and characters of a divine revelation; no poſſible evidence can be offered from this quarter, unleſs the foundation be laid in the religion of nature. Is there any ſenſe in talking of the goodneſs and juſtice of a general plan of revelation, unleſs our ideas of goodneſs and juſtice are firſt fixed and ſettled? Can we poſſibly recommend the excellence and importance of its precepts and doctrines, unleſs there be previouſly eſtabliſhed in the mind ſome ſtandard of excellence and importance? Can we be ſatisfied ourſelves, or with any propriety ſet about

about proving to others, that a revelation is worthy the divine original which it claims, unleſs we have ſome rule by which to meaſure its value, and are furniſhed with ſome antecedent knowledge of the divine attributes and character, to which we may expect every diſpenſation from heaven to be conformable? In ſhort, no obligation of obedience to any law can poſſibly be derived from the law itſelf, but muſt be grounded upon principles already eſtabliſhed in the mind. Here therefore the appeal unavoidably lies to the moral principles of our own nature. And from hence the path is eaſy and obvious; ſo eaſy, that one would think it impoſſible to have been miſſed. It muſt indeed be aſſumed, as the foundation of all, that we are beings of a moral nature; that there are implanted in us ſentiments of right and wrong, of virtue and vice, of good and evil. This, I ſay, muſt be aſſumed, as it is incapable of proof to a mind, if any ſuch there be, unconſcious of theſe ſentiments[1]. From our own moral character we

[1] It is obvious that reaſoning of all kinds muſt proceed upon principles in themſelves incapable of proof. There

we advance to the more exalted attributes of the Deity[1]; to that perfect righteouſneſs and tranſcendent goodneſs which admit

There muſt be always a bottom to build upon. Thus in matters of pure intellect the whole chain of reaſoning is founded upon ſome original axioms and ſelf-evident propoſitions. Thus alſo in moral ſubjects the appeal always lies to ſome original ſentiment, upon which the whole force of the reaſoning depends.

[1] There is however need of the greateſt caution in transferring human qualities to the ſupreme Being. Some of the groſſeſt ſuperſtitions of the heathen world owed their riſe to this proceſs of thought; which, though natural, is evidently capable of the greateſt abuſes. If they transformed their men into Gods, they as conſtantly transformed their Gods into men. But ſtill I aſſert, that there is no poſſibility of arriving at any knowledge of the moral attributes of the Deity, but by means of thoſe moral qualities which we are conſcious of in ourſelves, and which the mind is formed to eſteem and venerate in the human character. We cannot even have an idea of any principle of action in any Being, but what we feel and experience in ourſelves. No more than we can have the idea of any external object, without having received the impreſſion from ſuch object by our ſenſes. It is from its own powers only that the mind can proceed to thoſe of other agents. Though therefore an attempt to define the manner, in which the characters of wiſdom, juſtice, and goodneſs exiſt in the divine mind, were

mit neither of defect nor limits. From the view and from the experience of theſe attributes continually exerted in the government

were to the laſt degree preſumptuous and vain; yet it is moſt certain, that we muſt conceive them as of the ſame kind with thoſe which we are conſcious of in ourſelves. We muſt thus conceive them, or we can have no conception or knowledge of them at all; they are nothing to us. Theſe attributes of the Deity have been deduced in different ways according to men's different views of things, and their different turn of thought. Rouſſeau has choſen to deduce the infinite goodneſs of the Deity from his unlimited power, together with the principle of ſelf-love, ſuppoſed eſſential to all ſenſible Beings. But ſurely the ideas of power and goodneſs are ſo entirely different in our conception, that I ſhould much queſtion whether we can at all reaſon from one to the other. But let us hear his own words. Là le bonté eſt l'effet néceſſaire d'une puiſſance ſans borne, et de l'amour de ſoi eſſentiel â tout être qui reſent. Celui qui peut tout, étend, pour ainſi dire, ſon exiſtence avec celle des êtres. Produire et conſerver ſont l'acte perpétuel de la puiſſance; elle n'agit point ſur ce qui n'eſt pas. Dieu ne'ſt pas le Dieu des morts, il ne pourroit être deſtructeur et mechant ſans ſe nuire. Celui qui peut tout ne peut vouloir que ce qui eſt bien. Emile, tom. 3. p. 42. and in the note, Il eſt bon, parce qu'il eſt grand. The argument undoubtedly holds good, ſuppoſing the ſmalleſt degree of benevolence in the character. In that caſe, infinite power would give full ſcope to its

ment of the world, reſults every ſentiment of eſteem, reverence, gratitude and duty. Hence our indiſpenſible obligation of obedience to the

exerciſe, and would communicate to it, if I may ſo ſpeak, its own extenſiveneſs. But power and ſelf-love, however infinitely multiplied into each other, can produce nothing but power and ſelf-love. And ſurely that there is benevolence in the divine character is as fully proved from the effects of benevolence, and particularly from the exiſtence of this principle in ourſelves, as power or intelligence are from their effects.

But it may be aſked, are we then to aſcribe ſentiment to the Deity? I ſee no remedy for it; nor indeed do I ſee any harm in it. All happineſs and every degree of happineſs ſuppoſes ſentiment. Self-love, or to ſpeak more properly, a deſire of happineſs (for ſelf-love, as diſtinguiſhed from every particular affection, is nothing more than this) neceſſarily ſuppoſes ſentiment or feeling as its baſis; and can have no exiſtence without it. And here I would juſt obſerve, that the above-mentioned author, and indeed moſt other writers upon moral ſubjects, as well antient * as modern, uſe

* Such is Tully's account of the Stoics. Placet his, quorum ratio mihi probatur, ſimul atque ratum ſit animal (hinc enim ordiendum eſt) ipſum ſibi conciliari & commendari ad ſe conſervandum & ad ſtatum ſuum & ad ea omnia quæ ſunt conſervantiæ ejus ſtatus diligenda: alienari autem ab interitu, iiſque rebus quæ interitum videntur afferre. Id ita eſſe probant, quod antequam voluptas aut dolor attigerit ſalutaria appetant parvi aſpernanturque contraria. Quod non fieret niſi ſtatum ſuum diligerent, interitum timerent.

the divine commands, and of implicit reſignation to the divine will[3]. Should the Almighty

uſe the term ſelf-love very inaccurately. When it is applied to mere animals, it can have no other meaning than ſimply this; that they have capacities of pleaſure and pain. To ſay, that animals love themſelves, what is it but to ſay they love pleaſure, and hate pain, that is, that they love what they love, and hate what they hate? I cannot therefore but think the application of this term to animals utterly improper; becauſe they have no principle either of ſelf-love or ſelf-preſervation diſtinct from their particular intereſts and feelings. They are the objects of nature's love, and nature alone intends their preſervation. When this term is applied to rational beings, who are capable of forming plans of action with forethought and deſign, it means, either a deſire or an actual purſuit of happineſs, upon a previous knowledge and view of the means of acquiring it. It is here the offspring of reflection, and ſuppoſes, as I have juſt obſerved, particular ſentiments and feelings, as a kind of baſis upon which it builds its views and forms all its plans of action. Now the benevolent ſentiments, or thoſe whoſe object is the good of others, ſerve to form this baſis juſt as well as the merely ſelfiſh feelings, or thoſe whoſe immediate object is ſelf-good.

[3] What is the ground of moral obligation has been a queſtion much agitated. I ſhould think however it might admit of a very ſhort anſwer. It is the ſimple

timerent. Fieri autem non poteſt at appetant aliquid niſi ſenſum haberent ſui, eoque ſe & ſua diligerent. Ex quo intelligi debet principium datum eſſe a ſe diligendo. De Fin. L. 3. C. 5.

Almighty therefore have thought proper to diſcover further to his creatures any particular ſcheme of adminiſtration under the general

ſentiment of approbation. We are morally obliged to do what we approve, and to avoid what we condemn. And every degree of obligation, as diſtinguiſhed from mere phyſical force (than which no two ideas in nature are more diſtinct) will and muſt reſolve into this plain principle or feeling. The next queſtion is, what is the general ground of approbation? And what are thoſe qualities which excite this ſentiment in us? I anſwer; Goodneſs principally or benevolence. We are ſo formed as to approve this quality wherever we ſee it exerted, and in the degree in which it is exerted. And perfect goodneſs, that is the higheſt conceivable degree of it, commands our perfect approbation. Hence ariſes the fundamental obligation of obedience to human laws, and ſubmiſſion to human government; viz. from the ſuppoſed utility of ſuch laws, and the neceſſity of government to the welfare of mankind. Hence alſo ariſes the obligation of abſolute obedience to the laws and ſubmiſſion, to the will of God; viz. from our perfect approbation of the Divine character, founded upon a conviction of its perfect goodneſs. The circumſtance which obliges in this and every other inſtance, is not the *will* but the goodneſs or benevolent intention by which the will is governed and influenced. And it is from the full conviction of its being thus governed and influenced, that we are under any obligation of

ſubmiſſion

general plan of his providential government, to make a more full and clearer revelation of his will, than is afforded from the light of nature merely, by the ſucceſſive miniſtry of perſons endued with ſufficient power to evidence their divine miſſion and character, and ſhould he thereby have graciouſly opened to us more magnificent and endearing views of himſelf in a ſeries of the moſt intereſting tranſactions---ſuch a revelation we could not but at once acknowledge to be the *riches both of the wiſdom and goodneſs of God*, and we ſhould accordingly receive and embrace it with joyful and thankful hearts.

And indeed it happens, that this method of deduction is abundantly confirmed and verified

ſubmiſſion to it. *Mere will*, without any deſign at all, or which is the ſame thing, not carrying with it evidence of deſign, is nothing more than plain phyſical force. It may indeed *compel* to obedience, but at the ſame time excludes every *motive* to it. Will directed by *bad or malevolent* deſign is the object of abhorrence. It may indeed, as in the former inſtance, *enforce* ſubmiſſion, at the ſame time that it contains the ſtrongeſt *motives* againſt it. A conviction of good deſign can alone touch the heart, engage its ſincere approbation, and determine the mind to a full and undiſſembled compliance.

verified by that revelation of the divine will which has in fact been offered to mankind. The Goſpel contains no direct proofs of the great points of natural religion, but throughout ſuppoſes their truth, and makes perpetual appeals to them. Our Saviour's reaſoning upon the evidence which he offered in atteſtation of his divine miſſion is founded entirely upon this ſuppoſition. *Let not your heart be troubled; ye believe in God, believe alſo in me.* And in the words of the text. *The works which I do in my Father's name they bear witneſs of me:* and again, *If I by the finger of God caſt out devils, no doubt the kingdom of God is come unto you.* The whole force of the argument in theſe ſeveral paſſages depends upon the ſuppoſition, that thoſe to whom it was addreſſed were eſtabliſhed in the belief of a God, his infinite veracity, and other the eſſential perfections of his nature. Need I further add upon this ſubject the poſitive declaration of the Apoſtle. *He that cometh to God, muſt believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently ſeek him.* To aſſert therefore that "the knowledge of divine things is "from revelation only," and in conſequence

quence to infer and prove the firſt principles of all religion from any particular diſcovery of the divine will, at whatever time ſuch diſcovery be ſuppoſed to have been made, is in fact to argue in a circle, it is to prove neither natural religion nor revealed, but moſt effectually to deſtroy the only true and rational grounds of both [4]. The general propoſition therefore that "whatever comes from God is true," muſt, as being

[4] It ſee msto have been the pretty uniform opinion of our writers in defence of Chriſtianity, that there was an original revelation of religious truths at the beginning of the world, antecedently to any diſcovery of this kind by ſpeculation and reaſoning. I profeſſedly enter not into the merits of this queſtion, becauſe it is of no conſequence to the preſent point; nor indeed is it, that I know of, of any conſequence to religion in general. For whatever was the caſe with our firſt parents, whether the ſupreme Being communicated the knowledge of himſelf to Adam by immediate inſpiration, or whether being created in the perfection of his faculties he acquired this knowledge by reaſoning and reflection, it cannot in any wiſe affect us. His caſe is quite out of the common courſe of nature, and altogether ſingle. Religion muſt certainly now be *reaſoned* out. That is, the great truths of natural religion muſt firſt be proved and eſtabliſhed upon principles of reaſon, and from them muſt be deduced the authority of revelation, and the conſequent obligation upon mankind to receive it.

being an eſſential doctrine of the religion of nature, be admitted upon the footing of reaſon merely, antecedently to every particular revelation of the divine will, and altogether independently of it.

The ſecond and principal point in which reaſon is concerned to be ſatisfied, and of which alſo it is alone the judge, is, whether the doctrine or propoſition of whatever kind it be, thus offered to us as of divine authority, has a real and juſt title to this high original. And here the firſt circumſtance to be conſidered is the nature of the propoſition itſelf; whether it be in itſelf capable of a divine original. Now it appears to be ſufficient for this purpoſe, that it contain nothing contradictory either to truth or virtue, nothing either abſurd or immoral. It is impoſſible, that the God of truth ſhould give his ſanction to a falſhood. It is impoſſible, that the God of holineſs and purity ſhould afford the leaſt degree of ſupport and countenance to the promoters of vice and iniquity. But if the doctrine propoſed to our aſſent contains nothing contradictory in its own terms, or inconſiſtent with any previouſly known and eſtabliſhed truth, if moreover it contains nothing

contrary

contrary to thoſe ſentiments of right and wrong, of good and evil, which are original and indelible in the human mind, or in any degree deſtructive of their influence upon mankind, we may then ſafely attend to the evidence which may be produced in ſupport of its claim to the higheſt and moſt indiſputable authority.

By what kind of evidence a perſon may in the firſt inſtance be ſatisfied of the divine inſpiration, ſo that it may clearly and indubitably be diſtinguiſhed by him from the natural ſuggeſtions and operations of his own mind, can only be known to thoſe who have been thus *highly favoured of heaven*. Every other mortal muſt be as much in the dark with reſpect to ſuch an extraordinary inlet of knowledge, as any would be with reſpect to the objects of a ſenſe of which he was originally void. And ſurely the greateſt care ought to be taken, that we miſtake not the wild ſuggeſtions of imagination and enthuſiaſm for the effects of ſupernatural grace and divine illumination. It is not indeed of any conſequence to determine abſolutely, how far a perſon may be convinced himſelf of the divine inſpiration. Moſt certain it is, that no preten-

der to ſuch extraordinary illumination can claim conviction from the reſt of mankind, unleſs he produce other evidence beſides his own aſſertion, in ſupport of his pretenſions. *If he bear witneſs to himſelf only, his witneſs is nothing. A greater than he muſt bear witneſs to him.* It ſhould ſeem indeed, that God himſelf can alone bear infallible witneſs to his own interpoſition. But in what manner can the divine teſtimony be thus manifeſted to mankind by any particular perſon commiſſioned for ſuch purpoſe? There ſeems to be no conceivable method but by the production of ſuch actual ſenſible effects, as clearly and inconteſtably exceed the power of every inferior agent, and which are derivable only from a ſupreme almighty cauſe: that is, by miracles. Miracles and theſe only are the true ſeal and ſtamp of heaven. Theſe alone carry with them an authority which cannot be counterfeited, and therefore ought not to be reſiſted. For it ſhould be always remembered, that the queſtion is not, whether a man's doctrine or character be ſuch as muſt be approved by an all holy and righteous Being, but whether his doctrine be a matter of immediate revelation from heaven, and his

character

character bear the undoubted marks of a divine commiſſion. A teacher and a eminent example of virtue would, no doubt, claim the utmoſt attention and regard from every lover of virtue. The *righteous man, who cometh in the* name, and with the character of a righteous man, *ſhall receive* that eſteem and veneration, which is *a righteous man's* reward. But no man can teach as a prophet, or with the authority of a prophet, except in conſequence of a commiſſion delegated to him for this purpoſe from that Being, who has alone a right to command obedience from his creatures. And when ſuch commiſſion is atteſted by an avowed power of working miracles, there can remain no doubt as to its origin. A command over the powers of nature can only be derived from the author and ſupporter of nature. We infer and acknowledge an all-wiſe and good Governor of the world from a courſe of nature, uniformly and regularly conducted by ſtated laws, and for the moſt benevolent purpoſes. From the occaſional ſuſpenſion or violation of theſe laws we as juſtly infer the particular and extraordinary interpoſition of the ſame pro-

vidence, no doubt for purpoſes equally benevolent and merciful.

But in oppoſition to every argument of this kind, and by way of putting at once a period to them, it has been ſaid, "That miracles are ſo far from being a proper evidence for any other truth, that they are in themſelves and in their own nature abſolutely incredible; and the preſumption from experience is ſaid to lie ſo ſtrongly againſt the exiſtence of any miracles at all, that no degree of teſtimony is ſufficient to eſtabliſh their credit, or to turn the ſcale of probability in their favour *." And it has been repreſented by another writer in ſtill ſtronger terms, "as the groſſeſt ſophiſtry to eſtabliſh phyſical impoſſibilities upon moral proofs †."

In anſwer to this objection, which is happily of ſuch a nature as to be incapable

* Mr. Hume's Eſſay on Miracles.

† Je laiſſe à part le groſſier ſophiſme d'employer la preuve morale à conſtater des faits naturellement impoſſibles.—Lettres ecrites de la montagne, par J. J. Rouſſeau. Troiſ. Lett. p. 88.

pable of the leaſt degree of influence upon mankind in general, I would obſerve,

1ſt, That as the exiſtence of a miracle is the exiſtence of a certain fact, the proof of it muſt be derived from the ſame principles, and reſt upon the ſame footing, with that of every other matter of fact. It is an object of ſenſe merely, and only differs from any other ſenſible appearance, in that it is uncommon, and perhaps new. If we were to ſee a man walking upon the water, or raiſe himſelf up from the grave after every animal function had for ſome time ceaſed, we could no more doubt of the truth of theſe facts, than we could of any the moſt ordinary appearance in nature. The object is ſimply and preciſely the ſame in both caſes, and the method of conveyance to the mind is the ſame, by the means of the ſame bodily organs. In the firſt inſtance therefore, and with reſpect to the eye witneſſes of a miracle, the evidence is quite upon the ſame footing with that of every other fact. And indeed, upon our author's own principles, however ſtrong the preſumption from experience may be ſuppoſed to lie againſt an appearance of this

this nature, the evidence from ſenſe in its favour will be ſufficient to overbalance and and deſtroy it *.

2dly, It is to be obſerved, that this ſuppoſed phyſical impoſſibility of a miracle is altogether imaginary and groundleſs. Miracles are a violation of the order and courſe of nature. But is the order and courſe of nature fixed eternally and unchangeably in the neceſſity of things? Can it be demonſtrated *a priori* to be thus fixed, ſo that the interruption or tranſgreſſion of ſuch order ſhould imply a contradiction? No certainly †. The order and courſe of nature is from the ſole, and, as far as we know,

* See eſſay on miracles at the beginning.

† Mr. Hume expreſsly aſſerts this. "That there "are no demonſtrative arguments in the caſe ſeems "evident; ſince it implies no contradiction, that the "courſe of nature may change, and that an object "ſeemingly like thoſe which we have experienced "may be attended with different or contrary effects. "May I not clearly and diſtinctly conceive, that a "body falling from the clouds, and which, in all "other reſpects, reſembles ſnow, has yet the taſte of "ſalt, or feeling of fire? Is there any more intelligi-"ble propoſition, than to affirm, that all the trees "will

know, the arbitrary appointment of God. It is carried on by general and ſtated laws for wiſe and benevolent purpoſes, for the benefit and well being of mankind. Where therefore is the impoſſibility, that the ſame almighty providence, which graciouſly eſtabliſhed theſe laws, ſhould occaſionally interrupt and ſuſpend them, for the like purpoſes of benevolence, as a means of communicating more important benefits, and diſpenſing more valuable bleſſings to his creatures? Every impoſſibility neceſſarily involves in it a contradiction in terms. Such for inſtance, is that of a perſon's being alive and dead at the ſame time. But that the ſame perſon ſhould be reſtored to life, after having been for ſome time dead, is no contradiction, but is as eaſily conceivable as any the moſt common event in nature. A miracle then being a matter of fact, not impoſſible in itſelf,

" will flouriſh in *December* and *January*, and decay " in *May* and *June?* Now whatever is intelligible " and can be diſtinctly conceived implies no contra- " diction, and can never be proved falſe by any de- " monſtrative arguments, or abſtract reaſonings *a* " *priori.*" Philoſ. Eſſays. Eſſ. 4.

itſelf, and equally the object of our ſenſes with any other fact, it ſeems difficult to ſay, why it ſhould not be equally open to poſitive proof in its favour, or why the teſtimony of actual ſpectators, who muſt have equal means of conviction in both caſes, ſhould be readily admitted in the one inſtance, and abſolutely rejected in the other.

But in order to bring this queſtion to a point, it will be neceſſary to give a ſhort view of the objection itſelf, and of the principles upon which it reſts. It is ſaid then, "that "experience is our only guide in reaſoning "concerning matters of fact: that the "laws of nature are eſtabliſhed by expe-"rience ſolely: that our belief in teſtimo-"ny is likewiſe derived from the ſame prin-"ciple, from our having obſerved a general "conformity between fact and the reports "of others: that moreover in all queſtions "of fact, the aſſent is determined by the "higher degree of experience on one ſide, "than the other." In conſequence of theſe principles it is ſaid, "that the uniform "experience which has eſtabliſhed the laws "of nature, has the force of a poſitive ar-

"gument

" gument againſt any ſuppoſed violation of
" them, that it is to be oppoſed to all
" kind of teſtimony in favour of ſuch in-
" ſtances of violation, as proof ſet againſt
" proof. Moreover that, the experience
" which has eſtabliſhed the laws of nature
" being the firm and unalterable experience
" of all mankind in all ages of the world,
" the proof from experience againſt mira-
" cles is as full and entire as any argu-
" ment from experience can be ima-
" gined, and therefore cannot poſſibly be
" overbalanced and deſtroyed by any con-
" trary proof from teſtimony, founded it-
" ſelf upon the ſame principle, viz. expe-
" rience *."

In this argument we ſee it is ſuppoſed, 1ſt, That the proof in favour of miracles from teſtimony is founded entirely upon the ſame principle, experience, with the proof of an eſtabliſhed courſe of nature here ſet in oppoſition to it. And 2dly, It is inſiſted, that theſe two proofs being put into oppoſite ſcales, the former cannot poſſibly by any weight of evidence be made to overbalance the latter. Let us try then if it be in our

* Eſſay on miracles, page 1.

power to throw any light upon either of theſe queſtions.

That the laws of nature and the whole chain of cauſes and effects are with reſpect to us eſtabliſhed by experience ſolely is readily admitted. The point therefore to be conſidered is, whether the evidence ariſing from teſtimony be derived from the ſame principle, from experience likewiſe. Were it indeed true, as two late ingenious writers * have aſſerted in anſwer to this objection, that as there is an original principle of veracity in the human mind, by which it is determined to make a faithful report of what paſſes within itſelf, or has by any means come to its knowledge, ſo alſo there is, on the other hand, an equally original principle of credulity, or belief, in conſequence of which it at once repoſes its faith and confidence in the teſtimony of others, the point before us would be eaſily determined. Such a principle would evidently conſtitute a neceſſary relation between teſtimony and reality, antecedent to experience, and entirely diſtinct from it. But this,

* Dr. *Reid*'s enquiry into the human mind, and Dr. *Campbel* on miracles.

this, I fear, is not true. I am not conſcious of any ſuch determination to believe the teſtimony of others, as I am conſcious of to ſpeak the truth to them. Nor do I feel the leaſt degree of that reſiſtance and pain in refuſing my aſſent to their reports, which I moſt certainly do in giving them falſe information. Moreover, I do not, after the beſt examination, find the effects of ſuch an original determination in that early ſtate, when every natural principle, as it opens and begins to act, moſt clearly ſhews and diſtinguiſhes itſelf. From whence then ariſes the influence of teſtimony upon the mind? I anſwer, in children from experience altogether. Belief is in them the pure and genuine reſult of this principle ſolely. And the degree of credit they give to any relation is in exact proportion to the veracity they have experienced in thoſe with whom they have been converſant, and more particularly in the relator. This ſufficiently accounts for the greater degree of credulity obſerved in children, than in maturer age. Becauſe, bad as education is in general, it is to be hoped, that children are not ſo frequently deceived by thoſe about them, as to throw the balance of experi-

ence on the ſide of falſhood. If that indeed were the caſe, we ſhould find them quite as backward of belief as thoſe who have been ſo thoroughly verſed in the frauds and hypocriſy of the world [5]. In maturer age, when reaſon begins to exert her powers, and to take upon herſelf the direction of the inſtinctive determinations of nature, the influence of teſtimony upon the aſſent ariſes from another cauſe in conjunction with, and indeed under the regulation of experience. Every one is conſcious of a principle of veracity in himſelf. This principle the mind by a quick and familiar operation transfers

[5] When the principle of belief is once eſtabliſhed in children by experience, there are, no doubt, many circumſtances which engage them to greater credulity than generally appears in more advanced life. Their ſtrongly wiſhing any thing to be true will go a great way towards their believing it: it will be inſtead of a thouſand witneſſes in its favour. Nor have they ſufficient command of themſelves to attend to any evidence on the other ſide. Their fears likewiſe when raiſed to any degree have the ſame effect. The great delight which children receive from new ſtories and relations, tends alſo to fix in them the moſt ſteady belief of the truth of what they hear; nor can they eaſily be brought to entertain the leaſt doubt of the reality of thoſe accounts which give them ſo much pleaſure. But ſtill I maintain, that the bottom of all, the firſt connecting principle between teſtimony and reality is experience only.

transfers from itſelf to others, and is determined to give its aſſent to their teſtimony, from the ſuppoſition of their being under the influence of the ſame principle of veracity which it feels in itſelf. And we find in fact, that, ſuppoſing all other circumſtances equal, thoſe perſons are moſt inclined to give credit to others, and repoſe confidence in their reports, who have themſelves the ſtricteſt ſenſe of probity and honour. Though therefore the principle of credulity or belief in teſtimony be not original in the human mind, yet it follows immediately from an original principle, is neceſſarily connected with it, and derives its principal ſtrength from it. This appears to me to be the true ſtate of the point before us. And as it gives a different account of the origin of our belief in teſtimony, from that on which the argument under conſideration is founded, and traces it to an higher principle than experience merely, it muſt tend to leſſen in ſome degree the force of the argument itſelf, whether ſo far as to deſtroy it intirely ſhall be left to the conſideration of others [6]. I confeſs indeed myſelf to

[6] It is impoſſible to ſay preciſely, how ſoon children begin to reaſon from their own feelings to thoſe of others,

to have ſo ſtrong a faith in a principle of veracity, inherent in human nature, that tho' there are very many to whom I ſhould lend but a ſceptical ear in a relation that partook much of the marvellous, yet are there ſome few perſons in the world, in whoſe clear teſtimony I ſhould be inclined to repoſe an unreſerved and unbounded confidence, and which nothing ſhort of the abſolute

others, and conſequently to determine at what time a ſenſe of their own veracity inclines them to expect it in others. It moſt certainly does not, cannot in their mere animal ſtate. They reaſon then, as animals do, from experience ſolely. They are led to expect, that the ſame things will go together for the future, which they have obſerved to have uſually gone together. This principle is the great guide of their life. And without it they could ſcarce exiſt a moment. But what is the principle of veracity in children? It is the ſame as in animals, the expreſſion of their feelings ſimply; and indeed the involuntary expreſſion of them. The ſame principle extends gradually to ideas of all kinds. Till by and by the moral principle entwines itſelf with it; and veracity at firſt from a natural inſtinct merely, is now determined by the mind (whether from the view of its *utility* ſolely, it is not our preſent buſineſs to examine) to be a virtue and a duty.

ſolute impoſſibility of the fact would be able to overturn and deſtroy [7].

But 2dly, Let us examine, how far this ſuppoſed proof againſt miracles can in the nature of the thing be oppoſed to poſitive teſtimony in their favour, from whatever principle the influence of teſtimony is derived, ſo as abſolutely to overbalance and deſtroy it. The evidence from our own experience and the united teſtimony of mankind of an eſtabliſhed courſe of nature is, no doubt, as far as it goes, full, and entire, and concluſive. It amounts to a poſitive and ſatisfactory

[7] But it may be ſaid that belief even in this manner of deducing it, is derived from experience; from experience of a principle of veracity in ourſelves. Be it ſo. I will not diſpute about a term. But I inſiſt, that it is an experience of a very different kind from that by which the laws of nature are eſtabliſhed. Suppoſe for inſtance I had myſelf no principle of veracity, and conſequently could not reaſon from it with reſpect to others. My belief in teſtimony would then be the reſult of experience altogether, in the ſtrict ſenſe of the word, juſt as my aſſurance of the laws of nature is the effect of experience. Or ſuppoſe a ſpecies of animals either void of the principle of veracity itſelf, or which is ſtrictly the fact, incapable for want of the reaſoning faculty of transferring it to others, belief in them muſt be, what indeed it preciſely is in the brute creation, the effect of experience ſolely.

tisfactory proof, that there is eſtabliſhed throughout the univerſe a ſeries of cauſes and effects, following one another according to general and ſtated laws. Theſe particular facts, and the general laws reſulting from them, it ſufficiently and completely proves. Farther than this it can never go. It can never prove, that there has been no violation of theſe laws, that this chain has never been in a ſingle inſtance diſſolved and broken. It cannot prove a negative. Suppoſing therefore the proof of a courſe of nature to be even more full than it is; that is, ſuppoſing there had never been the leaſt hint given in any hiſtory, or from any tradition, of a violation of the common laws of nature, nor any trace of teſtimony in favour of a ſingle miracle; even this ſuppoſition could never prove the impoſſibility of a future inſtance of this kind, or authorize us to ſay, that ſuch an event would be abſolutely incredible. The argument therefore, which firſt aſſerts an eſtabliſhed courſe of nature, and from thence proves every deviation from it to be incredible, evidently begs the queſtion, and takes that for granted which it ſhould prove; namely,

namely, that there really *is* ſuch an eſtabliſhed order and courſe of nature, as neceſſarily excludes all exception, and all poſſibility of exception.

What degree of experience is neceſſary to the eſtabliſhment of a law of nature, the violation of which would juſtly be deemed a miracle, it is not material to determine. There are innumerable inſtances in which ſuch laws are aſcertained beyond a doubt. And if from any circumſtance attending the fact there is the leaſt ground of ſuſpicion, that any ſecret power, the laws of whoſe operation we are not perfectly acquainted with, concurred in the production of it, the miracle ought certainly to be rejected. And, no doubt, there may be ſuppoſed many caſes of this kind. There are, doubtleſs, powers continually operating in nature, whoſe laws are not, probably never will be, fully known and aſcertained.

And from this circumſtance, namely, from our acknowledged ignorance of many of the laws and powers of nature, has ariſen a ſecond general objection to the evidence from miracles, as not being certainly diſtinguiſhable by us from effects produced by

mere natural cauſes. And it is urged, "that whoever pronounces ſuch or ſuch an "act to be a miracle, declares by this aſſer- "tion that he knows all the laws of nature, "and alſo that this particular act is an ex- "ception to them *." But is it a conſequence, that becauſe all the laws of all the powers in nature are not known, therefore none of them are ſo far known, as that we may be able to judge with certainty in any particular inſtance, whether there be an actual violation of them? Was the earth at the command of any perſon to be arreſted in its motion for any conſiderable time, and every other part of nature to go on as before, could there be the leaſt doubt of the miracle in this inſtance, or of the power by which it was produced? It is not neceſſary to multiply examples of this ſort. They muſt be obvious to every one. The laws of

* Puiſq'un miracle eſt une exception aux loix de la nature, pour en juger il faut connoitre ces loix, et pour en juger il faut connoitre toutes. Car une ſeule qu'on ne connoitroit pas pourroit en certains cas inconnus aux ſpectateurs changer l'effet de celles qu'on connoitroit. Ainſi celui qui prononce qu'un tel ou tel acte eſt un miracle, declare qu'il connoit toutes les loix de la nature, et qu'il ſait que cet acte en eſt une exception. Ibid. Lett. troiſ. p. 89.

of nature are in numberleſs inſtances ſo fully known and fixed, that there cannot poſſibly remain the ſhadow of doubt, whether they could be interrupted or ſuſpended by any latent power in nature.

The author who has inſiſted with great confidence upon this laſt objection, concludes his reaſonings upon this ſubject with a third argument equally deſtructive of the evidence from miracles with either of the former. He urges "that the ſame authority "which atteſts miracles atteſts alſo preſ-"tiges *, or (as he has before defined them) "works really ſupernatural performed in "ſupport of a falſe doctrine †." If ſays he, preſtiges are denied, miracles cannot be proved; becauſe there is the ſame authority for both. If both are admitted, there is then no clear and certain rule by which we ſhall be able to diſtinguiſh the one from the other And in this caſe miracles prove nothing. For he adds, they who have recourſe to the doctrine for this purpoſe for-

 get,

* La meme autorité qui atteſte les miracles atteſte auſſi les preſtiges. Ibid. p. 101.

† Un acte bien réellement ſurnaturel fait pour ſoutenir une fauſſe doctrine. Ibid. p. 100.

get, that if the doctrine be eſtabliſhed the miracle is ſuperfluous, and that if it be not, it can itſelf prove nothing *." The author had obſerved upon this point in a former work, " that to try or prove the miracle by " the doctrine would be to argue in a cir- " cle. It would be to prove the doctrine " by the miracle, and the miracle by the " doctrine †."

It

* Si l'on nie les preſtiges, on ne peut prouver les miracles, parceque les uns et les autres ſont fondés ſur la même autorité. Et ſi l'on admet les preſtiges avec les miracles on n'a point de regle ſûre, préciſe et claire pour diſtinguer les uns des autres : ainſi les miracles ne prouvent rien. Je ſais bien que nos gens ainſi preſſés reviennent à la doctrine : mais ils oublient bonnement que ſi la doctrine eſt etablie le miracle eſt ſuperflu, et que ſi elle ne l'eſt pas, elle ne peut rien prouver. Ibid. p. 101.

† Ainſi donc après avoir prouvés la doctrine, par le miracle, il faut prouver le miracle par la doctrine, de peur de prendre l'œuvre du demon pour l'œuvre de Dieu. Que penſez-vous de ce dialecte ? Emile, Tome troiſ. p. 74.

This is part of the Vicaire Savoyard's confeſſion of faith. But as the reaſoning is adopted and defended by the author in other parts of his works, I am the leſs ſcrupulous to cite this paſſage as from him. Not indeed that the name of the author is in this inſtance of any ſort of conſequence.

It is impoſſible at preſent to enter into a full confutation of this argument, by examining particularly the nature and deſign of thoſe facts which it refers to as recorded in the ſcriptures. It will however be perhaps ſufficiently obviated, and the fallacy of it made appear by a fair ſtate and caſe according to the principles already laid down. If the doctrine be innocent or good, it may or may not be of divine original. By theſe words I always mean immediately revealed and communicated by God to man. It is only capable of being ſo. The actual proof of its divine origin is derived from miracles wrought in ſupport of an avowed claim to it. The miracle therefore does not prove, is not deſigned to prove the innocence or goodneſs of the doctrine but the divine origin of it. It does not, it cannot poſſibly prove any thing directly with reſpect to its intrinſick nature. It cannot alter, or in the leaſt degree affect it. On the other hand, if the doctrine be not innocent but clearly immoral and pernicious, the whole affair is at end. It is totally incapable of a divine origin. To enquire into the force of any evidence in ſupport of ſuch

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claim is, to ſay the leaſt of it, altogether loſt labour. And we may ſafely leave any ſuch ſuppoſed evidence to its own fate. In what ſenſe then does the miracle prove the doctrine? It proves nothing directly with reſpect to its intrinſick nature; it proves only a particular circumſtance attending it, its divine original. And in what ſenſe does the doctrine prove the miracle? By its intrinſick nature entirely, by its good or bad tendency. To prove therefore in this way the doctrine by the miracle, and the miracle by the doctrine, if this manner of expreſſion muſt be forced upon us, is not to argue in a circle. Becauſe the particular view or circumſtance of the doctrine by which the miracle is proved, is entirely diſtinct from that which is proved by the miracle. The divine origin of the doctrine is proved by the miracle. The miracle is proved or tried by the innocent or pernicious nature of the doctrine. The term doctrine here is plainly equivocal, and the fallacy contained in it is obvious.

Admitting then both miracles and preſtiges as reſting upon the ſame authority, the nature of the doctrine in atteſtation of which they are wrought, will always afford

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us a clear and infallible rule by which to diſtinguiſh the one from the other. If the doctrine be in itſelf abſurd or immoral, there is we may be aſſured, ſome miſtake with reſpect to the ſuppoſed miracle. It is either no miracle at all, or it is performed for a different purpoſe than that of eſtabliſhing the divine original of a doctrine in its own nature incapable of it. If the doctrine be neither abſurd nor immoral, the miracle is a full and deciſive proof of its divine original. And in this view ſurely, it is not ſuperfluous, unleſs it be ſuperfluous in the Almighty to add the ſanction of his authority in a full and direct manner to any moral precept whatever, or to communicate to creatures any knowledge of truth or duty, but what is diſcoverable by the exerciſe of their own natural faculties. The fallacy here is of the ſame kind with the former, and is concealed under the word *eſtabliſhed*. If the doctrine be already eſtabliſhed to be of divine original, no doubt a miracle or any other evidence in proof of this might be deemed ſuperfluous. But be it ever ſo well eſtabliſhed as to its intrinſick nature, ſome farther evidence will ſtill be neceſſary to prove, that it was immediately derived

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and communicated from God, and to impreſs it with the ſtamp of the divine authority. I ſhall only obſerve farther, that the fallacy here taken notice of ſeems to run through all the author's reaſonings upon this ſubject *.

Thus then we have pretty fully conſidered the ſecond propoſition, in which reaſon is concerned to be ſatisfied in a matter of divine revelation, and have endeavoured to ſhew, that any doctrine or ſyſtem of doctrines, not contrary to truth or prejudicial to virtue, when atteſted and ſupported by the clear authority of miracles, has a real and juſt title to the divine original which it claims. The infallible conſequence is, that the works which were done by *Jeſus Chriſt* in his Father's name, bear ample teſtimony to the character which he aſſumed, and prove inconteſtably the divine origin of the doctrine which he taught.

* Je tiens pour révélée toute doctrine où je reconnois l'eſprit de Dieu.

See alſo Lettres de la montagne—Lettre troiſ. p. 72, 73, &c. and where the author conſiders the purity and excellence of the doctrine, and the unblemiſhed virtue of the perſon who delivers it, as a full proof of the divine origin of the one, and the divine commiſſion of the other.

FINIS.

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ERRATA.

Preface, p. v. l. 17. for *anſwers*, read *anſwerers*. P. vii. l. 20. for *any a age*, read *any age has*. P. 9. l. 19. for *Là le*, read *La*. P. 10. l. 25. for *ratum*, read *natum*. Ibid. l. 27. for *conſervantiæ*, read *conſervantia*. P. 11. l. 13. for *intereſts*, read *inſtincts*. P. 17. l. 18. for *any*, read *any one*. P. 28. l. 4. for *been ſo*, read *been ever ſo*. P. 36. l. 23. for *dialecte*, read *dialéte*. P. 37. l. 7. for *and* caſe, read *of the* caſe. P. 39. l. 17. read *his* creatures. P. 40. l. 25. dele *and*.